

## June Angelos

### Cultivating the Ordinary and Finding God

“Perhaps our capacity to pay attention to God – like the capacity to lift weights or speak Spanish – only gets stronger when it gets exercised.”

John Ortberg, *God is Closer Than You Think*

On June 9 we'll celebrate the Day of Pentecost and then begin the long season of the church year, which itself is called the Season of Pentecost. In the Roman Catholic and Anglican traditions this is often called 'ordinary time.'

I've always liked this – ordinary time, because most of time is ordinary. Life would be exhausting (or maybe, more exhausting!) if every moment were something amazing. I appreciate extraordinary times because they are not the norm!

Ordinary time reminds me that if God is to be encountered it will probably be in the midst of our ordinary days. There's an occasional 'burning bush' moment where the presence of God is clear as can be. But mostly the bushes aren't on fire with God's presence, pretty much they seem to be nothing more or less than bushes.

One of my favorite John Ortberg books is called *God is Closer Than You Think*. He begins with two artistic visions, the first is Michelangelo and his great Sistine Chapel. It's hard to miss God there as he reaches out his hand in the creation of Adam. We often talk and think as though this blatantly obvious method of God's interdictation was the common Christian experience.



But then there is also the vision of English illustrator Martin Handford, who was the creator of *Where's Waldo* (actually called *Where's Wally* in the UK). You know how *Where's Waldo* works: Waldo, in his red-striped shirt is in every scene, but there's lots going on in every scene and there are lots of people on every page. But even if you don't see Waldo to begin with you can be assured that he is there, somewhere. The fun is to find him!



Waldo, God is often ordinary looking. The challenge becomes to find an often ordinary looking God in the midst of your ordinary days.

I'd like to use these next 3 summer months as a way of considering how God can be met in the midst of the ordinary. Think of the theme of summer as '**Cultivating the Ordinary and Finding God.**'

Cultivate is a word that comes from the world of farming and refers to the preparation of soil for planting. By extension the word has also come to mean the attempt of acquiring a skill. How do we cultivate God-finding skills in our ordinary lives?

I want to explore 2 ways to do this: First, as I did last summer I'm going to look at 3 films and try to think theologically about them.

Film is a principle way that culture tells its stories. As Christians we are taught to be attentive to story because this is the central way God has communicated himself to us in Scripture. As we think through 3 movies this summer we'll be exploring how God and his ways might be there on the big screen.

The films we'll look at are:

*Wide Awake* – This little film by M. Night Shyamalan (before he became famous for *The Sixth Sense*) follows a boy at a Catholic school asking the question 'Is there a God?' This is a movie you can watch with your kids and talk about afterwards.

*Silence* – Based on the novel by the Japanese Christian novelist Shūsaku Endō, this isn't one to watch with your kids! Directed by Martin Scorsese *Silence* tells the story of Portuguese missionaries who travel to Japan to discover what has happened to another missionary purported to have renounced his faith. Challenging to watch but with lots to think about.

*The Upside* – Tells the story of a wealthy New Yorker paraplegic and his relationship with a new caregiver. Funny, irreverent, and finally a nice story.

As I did last year you can join a group to watch the film together on a Saturday evening here at church, or watch it over the course of a couple of Thursday afternoons, or simply stream it at home.

The second way we'll explore God in the midst of the ordinary is by having 3 interview sermons which will focus on vocation. Martin Luther gave eloquent voice to the idea that all people, not just princes and religious workers, are called by God. Among his many thoughts on vocation is this:

*"The maid who sweeps here kitchen is doing the will of God just as much as the monk who prays – not because she may sing a Christian hymn as she sweeps but because God loves clean floors. The Christian shoemaker does his Christian duty not by putting little crosses on the shoes, but by making good shoes, because God is interested in good craftsmanship."*

Our church gives witness to many people living out their God-given calling. We'll use 3 sermons to dialogue on these callings. The hope is to challenge you to consider where God's calling is in your life.

I appreciate that the summer months give us the opportunity to explore God's presence in ordinary life in different ways. Be a part of the exploration!

In Christ-  
Pastor Ralf

*"We may ignore, but we can nowhere evade, the presence of God. The world is crowded with Him. He walks everywhere incognito. And the incognito is not always easy to penetrate. The real labor is to remember to attend. In fact to come awake. Still more to remain awake." C. S. Lewis, Letters to Malcolm*

Interested in reading about these ideas? Try . . .

Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in Everyday Life by Tish Harrison Warren  
(InterVarsity Press)

God is Closer Than You Think by John Ortberg (Zondervan Press)

